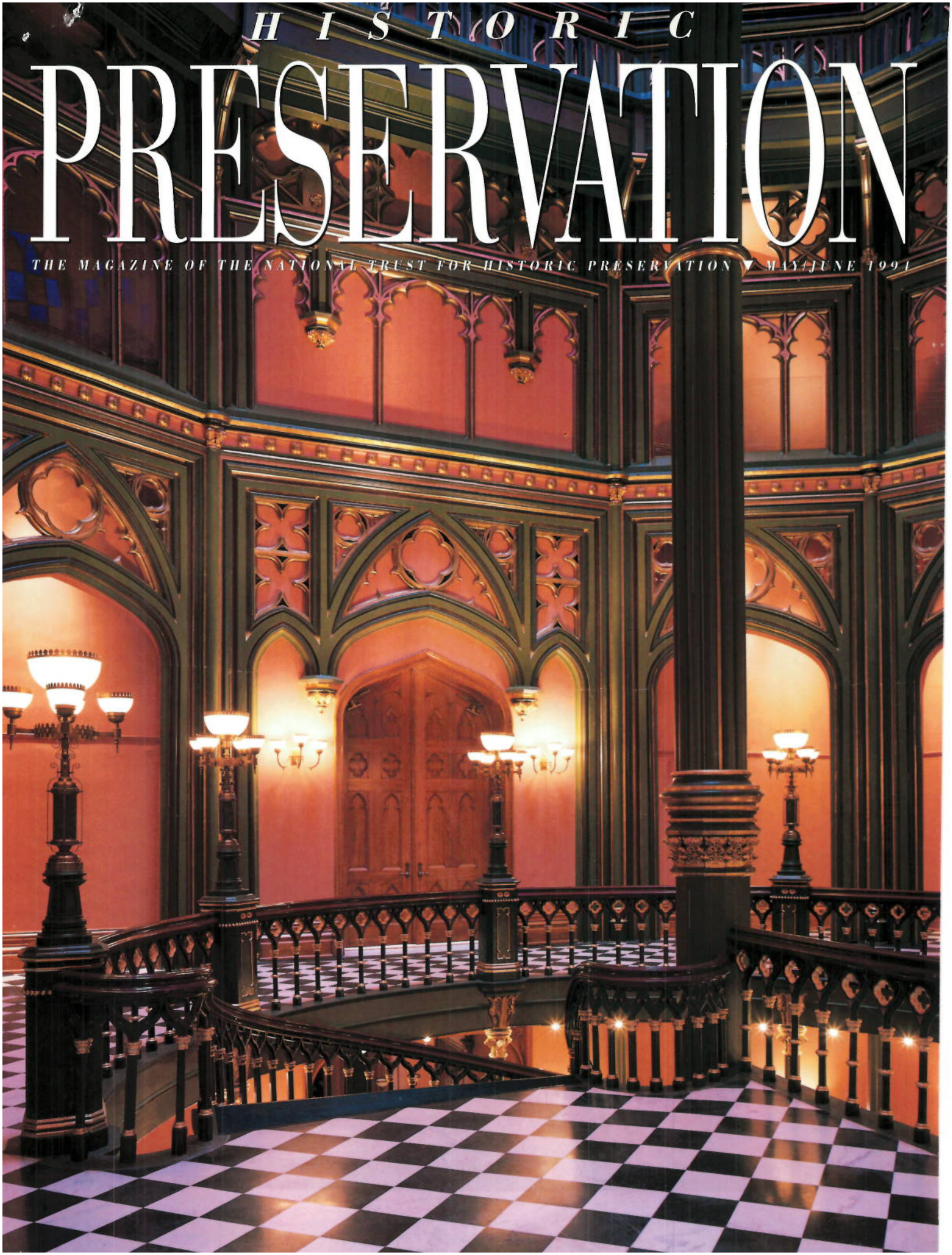


HISTORIC PRESERVATION

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION ▼ MAY/JUNE 1994

INSPIRED PARTNERS

Preservationists are training Chicago clergy how to cope with the secular duties of building stewardship.

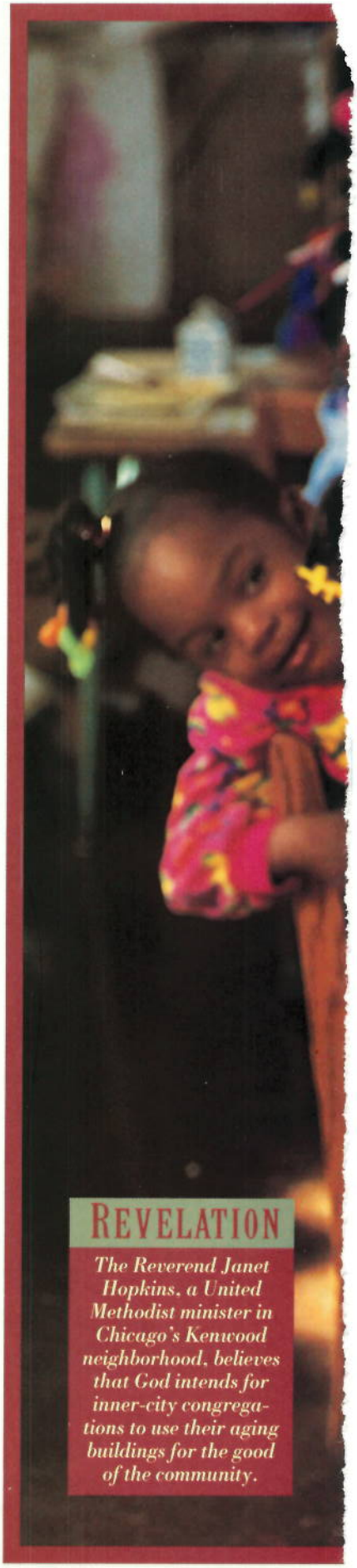
BY ANDREA OPPENHEIMER DEAN

It is easy to forget that the Reverend Janet Hopkins is barely five feet tall. What come to mind are her gumption and determination in confronting seemingly overwhelming odds. Her church, St. James United Methodist, is located in Chicago's Kenwood area, which, like most American inner-city neighborhoods, has been abandoned not only by its middle-class residents (both black and white) but by its institutions as well. "Because churches are the last institution left in many communities, we've had to expand what our social-service obligations are and become real community centers," says Hopkins. Her church houses a Head Start program, which is run by Catholic Charities; Kupona, a nondenominational AIDS support and counseling group; and the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, a civic entity intent on increasing the neighborhood's supply of decent low-income housing. Hopkins says she doesn't believe that God intended for her congregation and others like it to pay the gas and phone companies to keep church buildings running and not do anything important with them.

But then there is the problem that St. James is paying far too much to operate and maintain its aging building. It is at once the church's greatest asset and its heaviest millstone. The 56,000-square-foot structure, which was built 68 years ago for more than 1,000 members, now serves a scant 200 mostly elderly members. The meager resources of the members offer only frail resistance to a crush of expensive maintenance problems, which, if neglected, will eventually shutter St. James's doors and remove from the neighborhood one of its last remaining bulwarks against the effects of poverty. As Hopkins explains, her church has multiple roofs and a multitude of roofing problems. The wood-framed bell tower has sustained interior structural decay. The boiler suffers from deferred maintenance, and heating bills alone cost the financially strapped church $4,000 a month. In fact, fully half of St. James's annual budget of $98,000 is devoured by the costs of keeping its building operational.

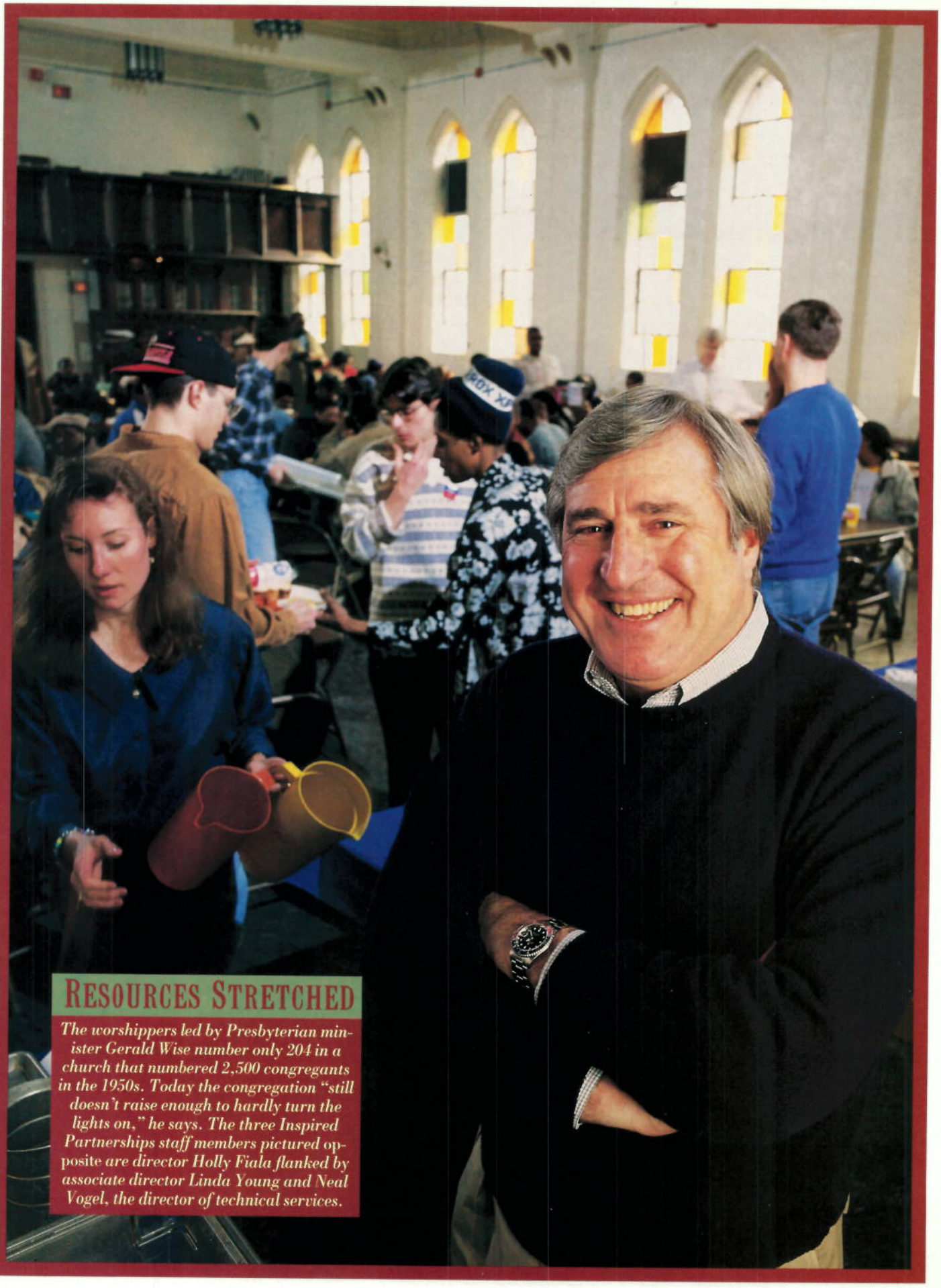
"When I saw what they could do to help us I felt a surge of new hope," says Hopkins, referring to Chicago's fledgling nonprofit, nondenominational Inspired Partnerships. The organization was formed as

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL MERIDETH



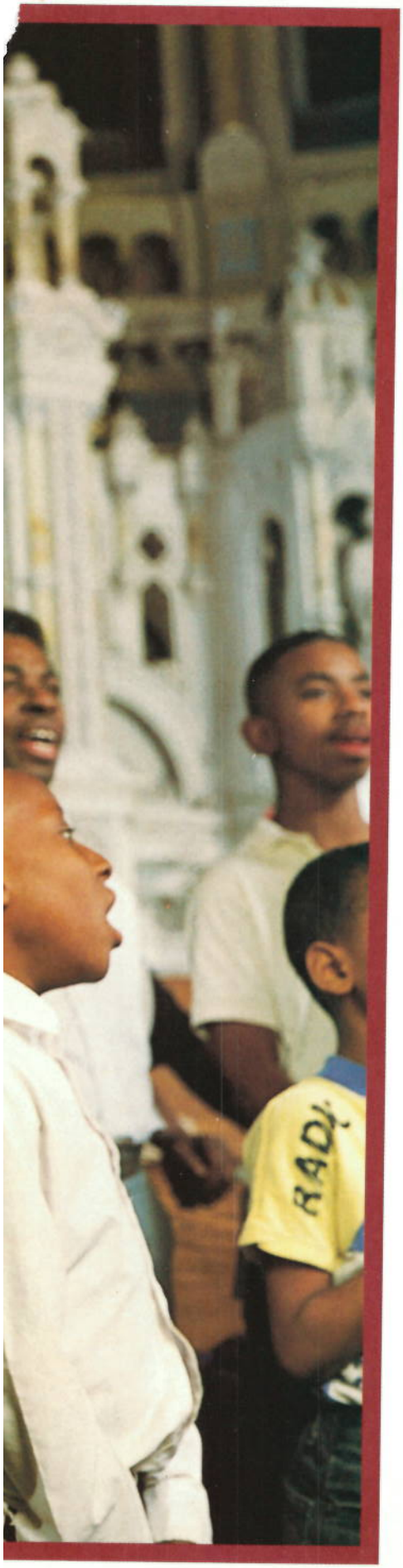
REVELATION

The Reverend Janet Hopkins, a United Methodist minister in Chicago's Kenwood neighborhood, believes that God intends for inner-city congregations to use their aging buildings for the good of the community.



RESOURCES STRETCHED

The worshippers led by Presbyterian minister Gerald Wise number only 204 in a church that numbered 2,500 congregants in the 1950s. Today the congregation "still doesn't raise enough to hardly turn the lights on," he says. The three Inspired Partnerships staff members pictured opposite are director Holly Fiala flanked by associate director Linda Young and Neal Vogel, the director of technical services.



TOO OFTEN A CHURCH ENDS UP WITH SHODDY, OVERLY EXPENSIVE WORK.

scope of work and going through a competitive bidding process. Too often, Fiala concludes, the church ends up with shoddy, overly expensive work "and with having to do the same work three and four times."

At least as problematic, says Neal Vogel, Inspired Partnerships's director of technical services, "is that a lot of pastors feel guilty spending money on their building when they have day care, meals programs, and other ministerial needs." It has been Vogel's experience that pastors tend to feel that their ministry is "all about people and not about buildings. They don't recognize that you can't have the one without the other." Most difficult to persuade, Vogel explains, are churches "that have this humble concept of preaching from the tent. But on nine-degree days in Chicago you need more than a tent to provide a homeless shelter." Although an older church must spend approximately two dollars per square foot a year on maintenance, many spend only thirty cents per square foot, according to Vogel, and the result is widespread crisis management. In a typical scenario, Vogel relates, "It's midwinter and the boiler's gone out. If they'd thought about it in the fall they probably could have caught the problems early, had more control over the repair work, and not been charged time and a half because the contractor is out there on a Saturday making repairs."

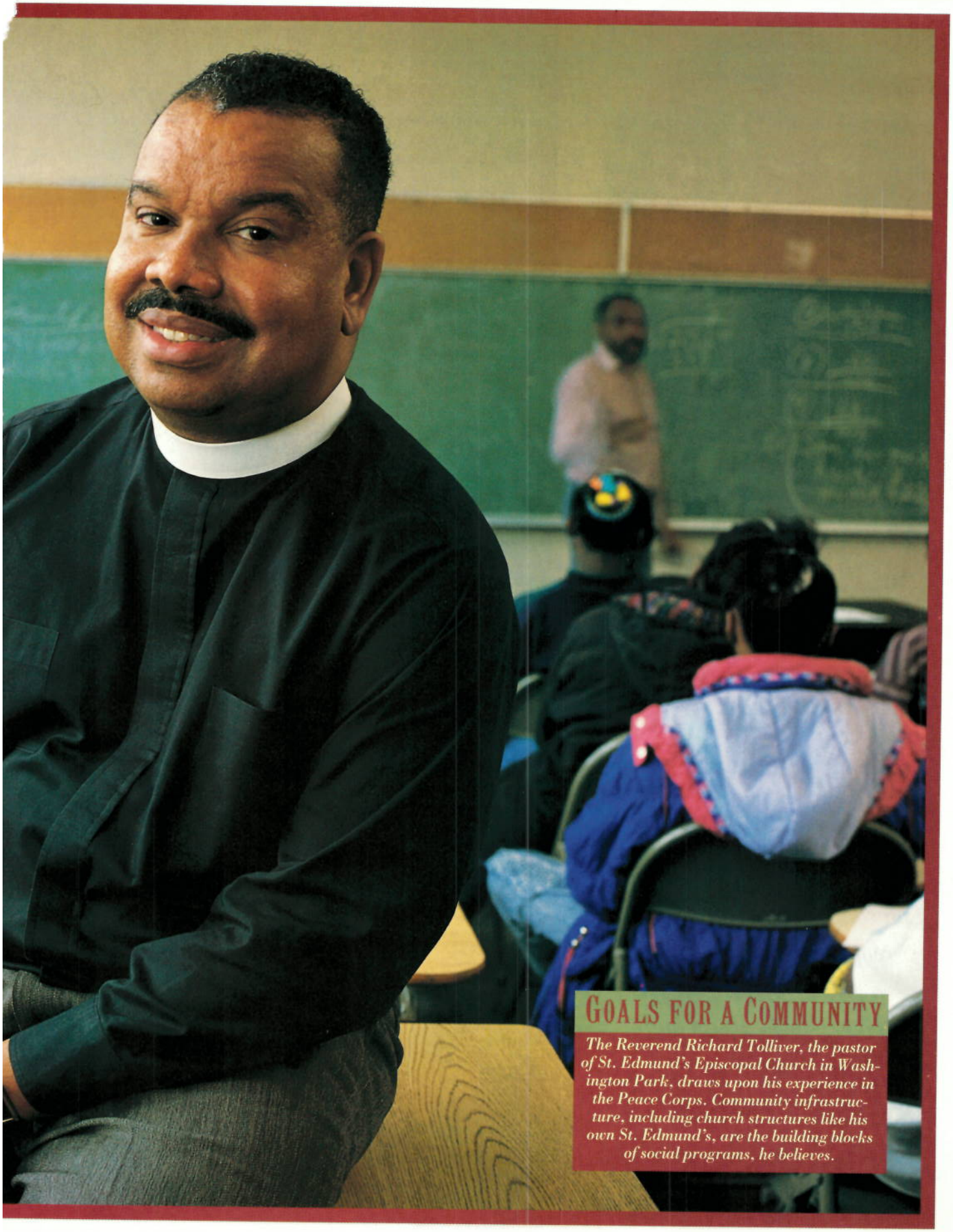
Most building committees are composed of inner-city residents, and most of them are not homeowners and therefore lack experience managing even a small structure, let alone a large, complex building. Moreover, the architectural characteristics that give old churches their appeal—their high ceilings, steep roofs, and tall towers—also make their care costly and difficult.

The decline into poverty of most churches is abetted by a prevailing attitude that despite their growing role as provider of social programs and despite shrinking memberships the churches should bear full responsibility for the care of their properties. "The philanthropic community is not favorably disposed toward the religious community, falsely believing that churches already get a lion's share of philanthropic dollars," Fiala says. "What they don't realize is that the money is not equitably distributed and that many denominational offices that used to support churches are in a survival mode themselves. The religious community is still not seen as a major player in solving community issues—although it is the linchpin of most needy neighborhoods."

To illustrate this point Fiala recalls that in the wake of the Los Angeles riots of 1992, Chicagoans, fearing a violent summer, raised more than $2 million for youth programs, but only $20,000 was earmarked for the religious community. At the same time, she says, churches are denied public support because governments fear breaching the barrier separating church and state, and banks resist lending to churches "because churches are considered bad risks." Inspired Partnerships fashioned its stewardship program to overcome these and other hurdles that hobble the religious community.

Among the pastors who completed the first yearlong, ten-session stewardship program, which ended last spring, is the intensely spirited and resourceful Reverend Gerald Wise of First Presbyterian Church. This church is located in Chicago's impoverished Woodlawn neighborhood, a community in which, says Wise, the unemployment rate among African-American males aged eighteen to thirty-five can be as high as seventy-eight percent. Problems linked to drug and gang activities are rampant, as evidenced by the bullet holes in the church's splendid stained-glass windows. "We're living in a war zone. We're right on the border between two main gangs," says Wise. "We actually have an agreement with the gangs, the Gangster Disciples and the Stones. They recognize our youth program as an alternative for kids."

The pastor further explains that his church, which served 2,500 members in the 1950s, now has a congregation of only 204, about three quarters of whom are



GOALS FOR A COMMUNITY

The Reverend Richard Tolliver, the pastor of St. Edmund's Episcopal Church in Washington Park, draws upon his experience in the Peace Corps. Community infrastructure, including church structures like his own St. Edmund's, are the building blocks of social programs, he believes.

fully instructive examples of interpreting material culture, and John Demos's *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford, 1970) uses inventories, wills, conventional documents, and artifacts, including the houses themselves, as evidence for exploring the Puritans' basic institution. Of the original sources *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*, a series of five unsigned documents from 1622 (Applewood Books, 1963), and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647* (Modern Library, 1981) are indispensable.

Of these the most enlightening is still Bradford, a great historian who introduces many of the recurrent themes of later American writers. His style is plain, his view ironic as he recounts the planting of a colony committed to communal values that is repeatedly threatened by, and quickly begins to disintegrate because of, individual greed. One of the satisfying observations that we can draw from our visit is that a zeal for the purity of historic interpretation has permitted the creators of Plimoth Plantation to reconstitute—in a very small but elegant fashion—the community that the religious zeal of our ancestors could not hold together. ▼

INSPIRED PARTNERS

(Continued from Page 34) stewardship program as a way to preserve and rebuild his most fundamental form of infrastructure, the church itself. Without a well-functioning building, says Tolliver, neither his housing corporation nor his church's social-service programs could thrive. Nor could he hope to reach his most cherished goal of reopening St. Edmund's elementary school as a model school for inner-city youth.

The pastor carried out all of the work recommended by Inspired Partnerships's building-conditions report: He had the building's roof replaced, its masonry repointed, its electrical system upgraded, and years of accumulated pigeon droppings cleaned from its bell tower. Tolliver then went beyond Inspired Partnerships's recommendations and made St. Edmund's accessible to handicapped parishioners, replaced windows, put in a new sound system, upgraded the organ, and installed computers.

Trustee Cornell Blaylock, Tolliver's assistant who tends to the day-to-day maintenance of the building and accompanied the minister to stewardship-program training classes, explains that "we wouldn't have known how to start without the [Inspired Partnerships] program." The program introduced Blaylock and Tolliver to a group of building professionals, including an expert on roofs who "analyzed our problems and wrote out our needs so we were able to talk to roofers as though we knew what we were talking about," says Blaylock. "I thought I knew a little about construction and maintenance before, but it was nothing compared to what I know now."

It is to gain firsthand experience and the confidence that it confers that a new group of pastors enrolled in Inspired Partnerships's second leadership program, extending from March through November of this year. In addition to the Reverend Janet Hopkins and sixteen other pastors, the Reverend Marshall Hatch, the pastor of the New Mount Pilgrim Baptist Missionary Church located in the West Garfield neighborhood, is a member of the group.

A year ago the congregation moved from a bare-bones warehouse into what was once St. Mel's, a 20,000-square-foot Romanesque Gothic Catholic church that was completed in 1911 and is distinguished by some of the most dramatic stained-glass panels in Chicago. During the year that Hatch's congregation has occupied the church and its school building, the pastor has established Youth Activities, a program that serves between thirty and fifty youngsters each week, and Mountain Men, a support group for young African-Americans.

Hatch will soon become the landlord of government-funded day-care and Head Start programs, will donate space for the City of Chicago's summer-jobs program, and anticipates establishing a support program for drug addicts as one of its other new programs. Hatch's most ambitious dream, however, is to develop a model elementary school for neighborhood children "to show that you can educate any child with good, community-based schools that are linked with churches."

The pastor's problems, which are similar to those of Hopkins, are nevertheless formidable. New Mount Pilgrim Baptist Missionary Church's roof leaks, its copper downspouts have been stolen, its windows are falling apart, there is significant plaster damage, and the church still depends on the original oil heating system. "What we need is expertise for our staff in operating the facility and access to specialists and companies that are very familiar with working on these kinds of buildings," says Hatch.

Hatch will receive from Inspired Partnerships such help and much more that will permit his ministry to continue and to expand its community role. Fiala underscores the importance of that role: "In the African-American community churches have been the place where leadership is developed, where entrepreneurship is encouraged, where family life is affirmed, where social services are offered."

Inspired Partnerships's most significant role, as the program's assistant director, Linda Young, puts it, "is that it demonstrates how preservation can serve neighborhood revitalization." ▼

For more information about Inspired Partnerships, contact Holly Harrison Fiala, 53 W. Jackson Boulevard, Suite 852, Chicago, Illinois 60604-3611, (312) 294-0077.

CAPITAL CASTLE

(Continued from Page 45) above the second floor." (The building was also designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974.) Sixty-one feet above the first floor, sunlight illuminates 2,054 panes of clear and colored glass in kaleidoscopic patterns. Observed from a balcony suspended between the third and fourth floors, a spiral staircase descends from the second floor into a dizzying checkerboard of black and white marble. On the first floor, one's eye is drawn to the door of the governor's office.

Reoccupied by the governor and legislature in 1882, the capitol reopened during a period of corruption exceptional even by Louisiana's standards. Historians believe that Louisiana probably didn't have a single honest state election between 1868 and 1900. Much of the blame can be imputed to the Louisiana State Lottery Company, which was created by legislation in 1868 and for a quarter of a century co-opted governors, legislators, judges, and state officials while benefiting every worthy cause that solicited help.

The most factious era opened in 1928 when the state elected Huey P. Long, the Louisiana Kingfish, as governor. Long's campaigns to improve public education, build roads and bridges, and champion the

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1995

National Report

The New York Times

In a Faded Chicago Area, a Full-Time Church Shoulders Full-Time Burdens

Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, Feb. 2 — The old-timers at the Progressive Community Church, in a faded part of Chicago's South Side, remember when parents and their children went to church on Sundays for a fiery sermon that would last them through the week. But Sunday is no longer the only day to go to Progressive, at least among those — more than 70 percent of the total — who attend but are not members.

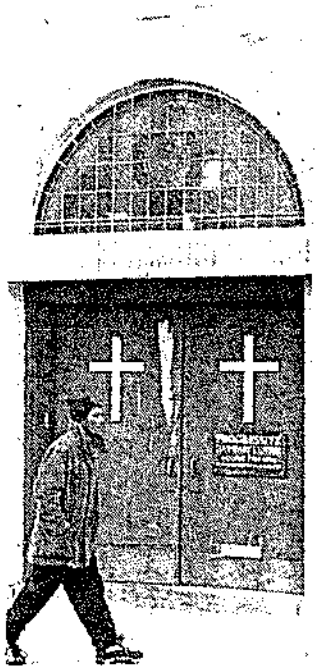
The nondenominational church, which serves a poor predominantly black neighborhood, has become an all-purpose community center open seven days a week, from 6 in the morning to 11 at night. It offers everything from a hot meal to day care, from nighttime youth programs to diapers for infants of young single mothers. To provide those services, the church relies on a patchwork of government aid, donations from local businesses and help from congregants who are often hard pressed themselves.

"It's always a struggle," said the pastor, the Rev. B. Herbert Martin, "but the church has a role to play."

Among churches like Progressive, that role, already grown in recent years, seems likely to grow further still as the new Congress and states from coast to coast, trying to pare their budgets, shift more of the burden of caring for the poor to philanthropies.

A study by Independent Sector, a Washington-based clearinghouse on religion in the United States, found that in 1986, total revenue of the nation's religious congregations was $49.6 billion, of which $1 billion was spent on assistance for the poor. By 1991, the authors estimated, revenue had slipped to $48.4 billion while aid to the needy had soared to $7 billion.

And at Mr. Martin's inner-city church, the proportion of assistance to the total budget is far higher: about half of the $418,000 that the church has raised for the current year, the pastor said.



At the Progressive Community Church, the poor can find virtually anything they need.

Such spending fills an important niche. For instance, Inspired Partnerships, a nonprofit group that helps congregations find the most cost-efficient ways to maintain their churches, estimates that Chicago churches house 60 percent of all food distribution programs in the city.

Even as they do so, Progressive and similar churches here have a hard time just staying open. Many are in buildings that date from the turn of the century. The whites who built them and prayed in them have long since moved to the suburbs, and the structures they left behind are expensive to heat and in need of costly repairs. Inspired Partnerships says that of all Chicago churches at least 40 years old, a third are in disrepair.

"They help mend the broken places in people's lives," said Holly Fiala, executive director of Inspired Partnerships. "It's not their spirits that are broken, it's the buildings."

The Progressive Community Church itself was built as a synagogue in 1895 by Jews of English, Scottish and Russian descent and is now one of the oldest buildings in the community. Progressive bought it in 1922 and has watched the neighborhood grow ever needier in recent years.

"Our church is in the center of despair," said Bob Strickland, a trustee there. "It's like throwing snowballs at the sun."

Progressive has just patched its roof, but the gutters need replacing, the stained-glass windows have to be caulked, and the church just spent over $5,000 to have the boiler repaired.

"The cost of operating these old facilities is a significant burden to congregations," Ms. Fiala said. "The preservation of the facility is not the end goal; the end goal is to preserve the community."

And that can mean taking on all kinds of tasks: providing emergency housing, lending neighborhood residents money for transportation to work or job interviews and buying milk and diapers for young single mothers who are having trouble paying their bills.

Mr. Strickland's primary function as a church trustee is fund raising, but that limited role has broadened to include buying 20 white shirts and blouses for children from a nearby public housing development who wanted to sing in the choir but could not afford the uniforms.

"Every week," Mr. Strickland said, "my wife and I wash and iron 20 shirts and blouses — and I don't know how many pairs of white gloves — on a washboard so that they are clean for Sundays. We started out buying shirts for three or four of them, but then they brought their brothers and sisters."

> More than worship, a great deal more, goes on here.

Many of the church's members double as counselors or surrogate parents. The church also provides meeting space for Cub Scout troops and, as an alternative to gangs, nightly youth activities.

"We have kids whose every waking moment is spent in this building," said one congregant, Laura Alexander. "If they aren't in school, they are at the church. And sometimes you have to say: 'It's curfew time. You all have to go home.' "

Last Christmas, the church fed 500 families with grocery baskets filled with enough food to last each family a few days. But even that did not meet all the need: more than 1,000 families had lined up to receive a basket.

"Wintertime is the worst time of the year," said Mr. Martin, the pastor. "It is an awful feeling to have to turn people away when you can see there is a need."

But, talking with a reporter, Mr. Martin did not have much time to dwell on that. He was off to find out how much it would cost to repair the two 10-foot oak doors in the front of the church. Both are coming off their hinges.

Photographs by Paul Merideth for The New York Times

Day care is one of the services offered by Progressive, but the despair of the surrounding area, a trustee says, means that the church's efforts are "like throwing snowballs at the sun."